

TESTIMONY OF  
CONGRESSWOMAN MAZIE K. HIRONO  
BEFORE THE HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
IN SUPPORT OF EQUITY FOR FILIPINO VETERANS OF WORLD WAR II  
FEBURARY 15, 2007

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the matter of equity for Filipino veterans of World War II. This is an important issue for me and many families in Hawaii.

As you know, Filipino veterans are those that honorably answered the call of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and served alongside our armed forces during World War II. They fought shoulder to shoulder with American servicemen; they sacrificed for the same just cause. We made a promise to provide full veterans' benefits to those who served with our troops. And while we have made appreciable progress toward fulfilling that promise, we have not yet achieved the full equity that the Filipino veterans deserve.

I am proud to be an original cosponsor of H.R. 760, The Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007, which was introduced by the Chairman to provide the necessary reclassification of the service of Filipino veterans to make them eligible for all the veterans' benefits programs administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs. In essence, H.R. 760 makes good on the promise our government made to these brave men over sixty years ago.

Today, out of the 250,000 veterans, only 22,000 remain and of that number 2,000 reside in my home state of Hawaii. As Filipino veterans are entering the sunset years of their lives, Congress is running out of time to fulfill our obligations to them.

I would also like to take this time to discuss an effort that I am jointly working on with Senator Daniel K. Akaka to provide for the expedited reunification of the families of our Filipino veterans. Prospective family-based immigration applicants from the Philippines face substantial, often decade-long waits for visas. It is our aim to introduce a bill that would further the recognition of the service of Filipino veterans by granting their children a special immigration status that would allow them to immigrate to the United States and be reunified with their aging parents.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to speak today on the need to fulfill our obligations to our Filipino World War II veterans.